
Gingrich Defends Book Deal To House Ethics Committee

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By R.H. Melton
Washington Post Staff Writer

House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) defended his book deal yesterday to members of the ethics committee in a three-hour session the panel's senior Republican described as "very freewheeling."

Although a grim-faced Gingrich declined afterward with reporters to discuss his appearance, one participant in the closed-door meeting described it as "not testy, not personal, not hostile."

Gingrich sat at the head of the committee's long conference table in what House records suggest was on-

ly the second time in history that a speaker gave sworn testimony before the House ethics committee. In 1989, then-Speaker Jim Wright (D-Tex.) appeared before the committee to respond to charges that Gingrich had initiated.

Gingrich began the meeting yesterday with opening remarks, describing for the panel's five Republicans and five Democrats the genesis of his best-selling book, "To Renew America," one source said. The original book deal called for him to receive a \$4.5 million advance, but after bipartisan criticism, he accepted a \$1 advance and the standard royalty.

The book is the focus of one of five ethics complaints against him. Filed by the Democrat defeated by Gingrich last fall, the complaint contends the speaker abused his office in part by using a tax-exempt foundation and one of his political organizations to create a commercial book that could earn him millions of dollars. The complaint also said that having HarperCollins as his publisher constituted a conflict of interests for Gingrich, since the company is owned by media baron Rupert Murdoch, who has many business interests before Congress. Murdoch will testify on Tuesday.

Sources said Gingrich veered very little yesterday from his public defense of the book deal: that he had prior approvals from the ethics panel, that there was no conflict over Murdoch's ownership and that the book represents a collection of his long-held views about this country.
